

Contract Cheating in Canada: How it Started and How it's Going

Canadian Symposium on Academic Integrity (CSAI) 2021 (Online)

Thompson Rivers University, Kamloops, BC, Canada

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Abstract

Purpose: The goal of this session is to provide an in-depth account of the history and development of contract cheating in Canada over the past 50+ years. You will also learn about the one and only (failed) attempt at legislation to make ghostwritten essays and exams illegal in Canada.

Method: The content of this session is drawn from Eaton's book chapter on contract cheating in the forthcoming edited volume, *Academic Integrity in Canada: An Enduring and Essential Challenge* (Eaton & Christensen Hughes) that involved over a thousand hours of historical research and digging into archival material to uncover that the contract cheating industry in Canada has been operating successfully for longer than most of us ever realized.

Results: Get the details on a criminal case in the 1980s, noted as being the first of its kind in Canada, and possibly the Commonwealth, that made history when an essay mill owner and his wife were charged with fraud and conspiracy. The case was dismissed by the judge, leaving the contract cheating industry to flourish in Canada, which it has done with a vengeance.

Then learn about an exposé in a major US magazine in the 1990s that presented in-details about the experiences of writers who supplied services to the contract cheating industry. Now that we are in the 21st century, find out what's being done across the country today to take action against contract cheating.

Implications: I share previously undiscovered evidence and insights that shows how the contract cheating industry has been proliferating in Canada for at least half a century. Even if you thought you knew about contract cheating in Canada, you'll almost certainly learn something new in this session. I conclude with strong calls to action for educators, advocates, and policy makers.

Keywords: academic integrity; academic misconduct; Canada; term paper mills; essay mills; contract cheating

Supplementary materials: 26 figures; 39 references

Note: The abstract for this paper was editorially peer-reviewed by the conference organizers.

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Welcome to “Contract cheating in Canada: How it started and how it’s going”.

Figure 1

Slide 1: Welcome



**Contract Cheating in Canada:
How it Started and How it's Going**

Canadian Symposium on Academic Integrity (CSAI) 2021 (Online)
Hosted by Thompson Rivers University, Kamloops, BC
June 22, 2021

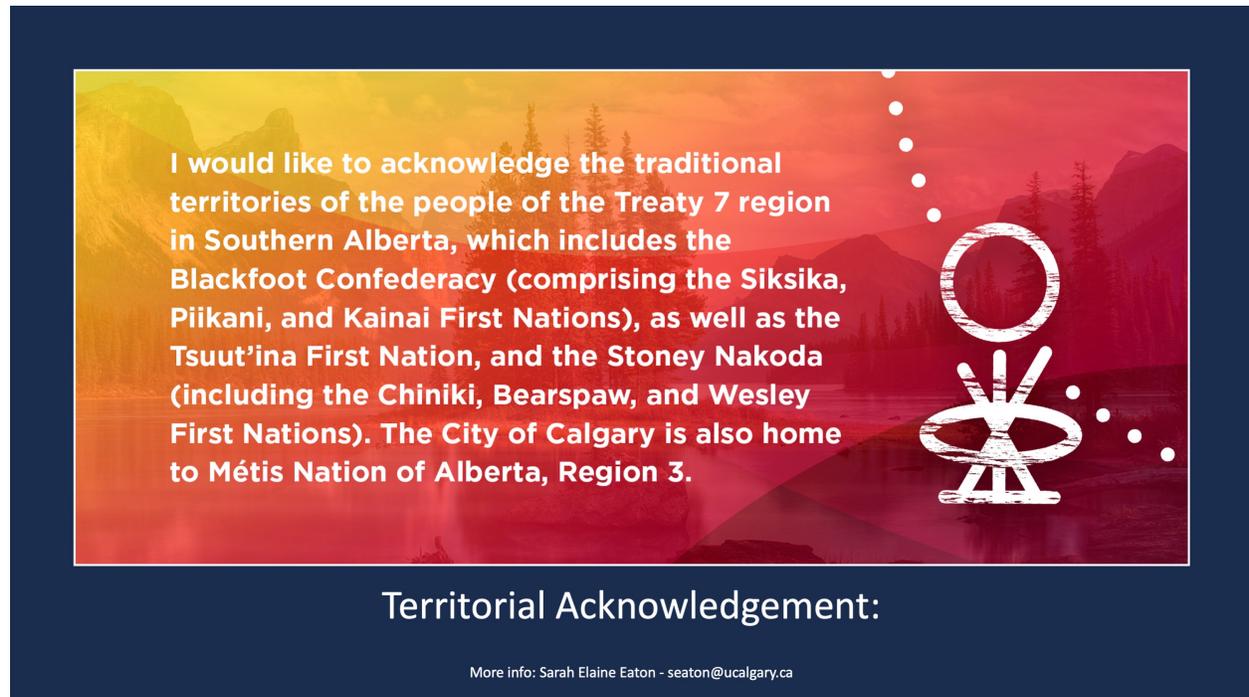
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I start today's session with an acknowledgement of the land.

Figure 2

Slide 2: Territorial Acknowledgement



I join you today from my home in the city of Calgary, which is located on the traditional territories of the people of the Treaty 7 region in Southern Alberta. These include the Blackfoot Confederacy (comprising the Siksika, Piikani, and Kainai First Nations). It also includes people from the Tsuut'ina First Nation and the Stoney Nakoda, who include the Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Wesley First Nations. Calgary is also home to the Métis Nation of Alberta, Region 3.

Much of the content of my presentation today is drawn from my book chapter (Eaton, 2021a) on contract cheating in the forthcoming book, *Academic Integrity in Canada: An Enduring and Essential Challenge* (Eaton & Christensen Hughes, eds). I am co-editing the book, together with Julia Christensen Hughes. The book contains more than 30 chapters from contributors across Canada, including 4 chapters on contract cheating. A number of the contributors are presenting their work at this symposium. The book is currently in production and we expect it will be available in a few months. Thanks to a grant from the University of Guelph, the book will be completely open access and available free of charge from the publisher, Springer.

Figure 3

Slide 3: Forthcoming book

The slide is titled "Forthcoming Book" in a blue header. Below the header is a table with four rows, each listing an author and a chapter title. To the right of the table is a dark grey box containing a bulleted list of book details. At the bottom left of the slide, there is a small text link for more information.

Katherine (Katie) Crossman	"Education as a financial transaction: Contract employment and contract cheating"
Sarah Elaine Eaton	"Contract cheating in Canada: A comprehensive overview"
Brenna Clarke Gray	"Ethics, ed tech, and the rise of contract cheating"
Nancy Chibry & Ebba Kurz	"Pay-to-pass: Evolving online systems that undermine the integrity of student work"

- *Academic Integrity in Canada: An Enduring and Essential Challenge* (Eaton & Christensen Hughes, eds., Springer)
- Will be **open access** and **available free of charge**.
- 30+ chapters in total.
- Includes 4 chapters on contract cheating.

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In my presentation today, I will take you on a journey across Canada and parts of the United States, giving you glimpses into how the early contract cheating industry has been actively operating in Canada for more than half a century. I'll give specific details about how the industry has grown in Canada and attempts to curb it. I'll conclude with a call to action about what we can do about it. My intention with this presentation is to provide something new and valuable for everyone, even for those who have been working on contract cheating in Canada for some time.

You have my permission to take screen shots of any of the slides and share them on social media. I'm also pleased to provide a complete copy of this presentation to anyone who would like it.

Our story starts in the late 1960s at the University of Toronto, where the student newspaper, *The Varsity*, began running ads for term paper and thesis writing services. This one, from February 9, 1968 reads, "THESIS & TERM PAPERS on Smith Corona electric. Will organize from your notes. Four years [sic] experience. Please call 923-5597 after four." (All caps in original).

If we ignore grammatical error in the ad, which we could chalk up to frugality, since classified ads were often charged by the word or by the character, we can focus on the content, which alludes to a freelance writer with several years of experience offering to produce papers on a good quality typewriter. The ad shows that the services being offered are much more than simple typing services.

Figure 4

Slide 4: Student Newspaper Ad, The Varsity, 1968

In the late 1960's advertisements for contract cheating were appearing in Canadian university student newspapers.

THESIS & TERM PAPERS on Smith Corona electric. Will organize from your notes. Four years experience. Please call 923-5597 after four.

University of Toronto, *The Varsity*
February 9, 1968
Page 23

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(As an anecdotal aside, I learned to type in high school in the 1980s and even then, we learned to type on manual typewriters because they were cheaper and our teacher said it would strengthen our fingers to learn on a manual typewriter. She claimed electric typewriters would make us lazy.)

This is an example of an independent freelancer, but we have evidence that around the same time, the commercial term paper industry was well established. Much of what we know about the early contract cheating industry through the 1960s and 1970s comes from the United States, when the industry began operating at scale. Canada's story seems to be intertwined with what was happening in the US during that time.

Let's start in the United States for a moment, because it is relevant to the Canadian context. Our story takes us back to the Eastern Seaboard of the US, and specifically, Boston.

Figure 5*Slide 5: Termpapers Unlimited*


1970s example:
Termpapers
Unlimited

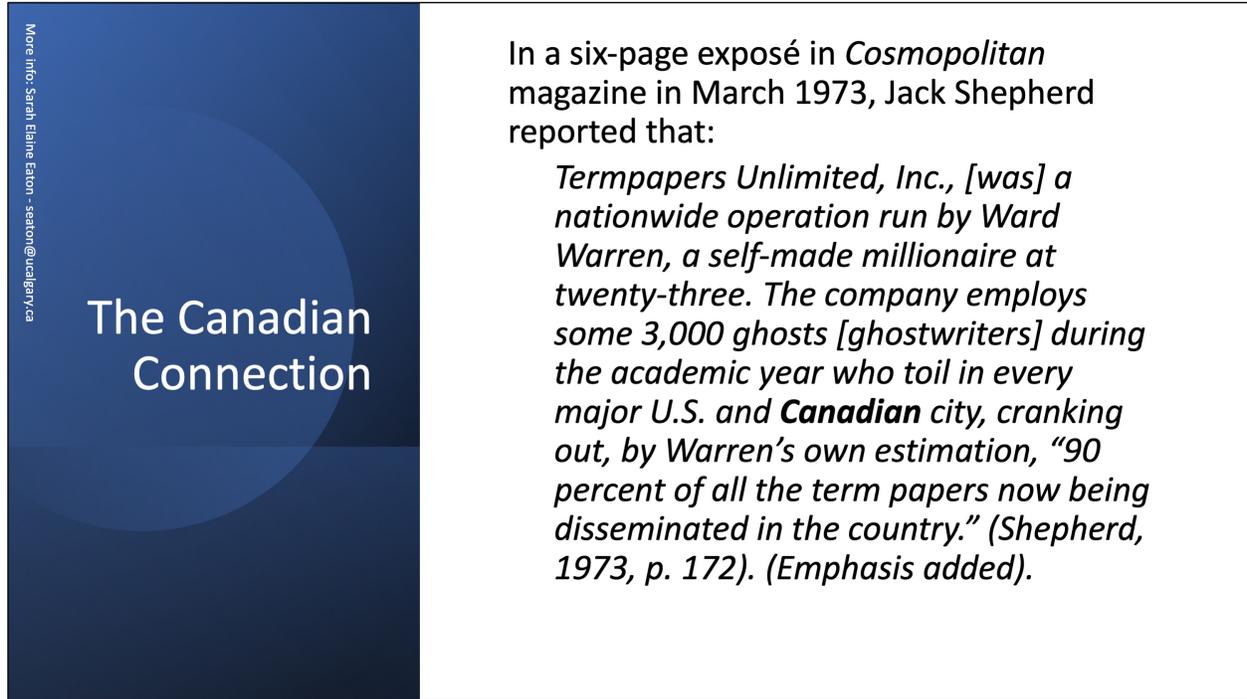
- The story of the Warren brothers...
- It all (allegedly) started with a hitchhiker...

(Goodman, 1971a, 1972b; Maeroff, 1972; Time Magazine, 1971)

More info: Sarah Elaine Eaton - seaton@ucalgary.ca Image source: ColourBox

In 1971 news stories began appearing about a pair of brothers, Ward, aged 22, and Kenneth (Ken), aged 26 at the time. Ward had ran the coffee shop at Babson college in Boston when he was a student there. The story goes that Ward picked up a hitchhiker one night after work. The part-time student barista had a term paper due the next day and offered to pay the hitchhiker to write the paper for him. Young Ward, an entrepreneur at heart, realized that there might be market for a service offering term papers for sale (Goodman, 1971a, 1971c, Thornton, 1977) and the idea for a new business was born. Ward got his brother on board with the idea and not long after, the two of them launched Termpapers Unlimited Inc., which allegedly “virtually started the industry” (Thornton, 1977, p. 9). Ward eventually left the coffee shop at the college and dedicated himself full-time to the business, which is reported to have started generating profit immediately after they started it. All of this seems to have happened somewhere around 1969.

By 1971 Termpapers Unlimited claimed to have more than 100 writers on staff “with proven ability, to produce term papers on virtually any subject” (Shearer, 1971, p. E6), and had branch offices in both Boston and New York (Goodman, 1971b). Pre-written papers cost students \$2 USD a page, and custom-written papers cost \$3.50 USD per page. The Warren brothers claimed to have sold 10,000 papers, grossing about \$250,000 USD by mid-1971.

Figure 6*Slide 6: The Canadian Connection*

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The Canadian Connection

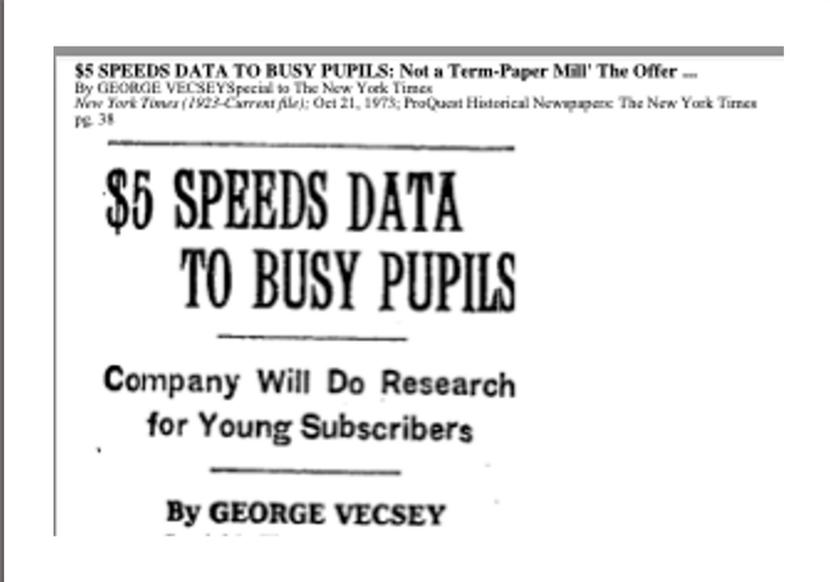
In a six-page exposé in *Cosmopolitan* magazine in March 1973, Jack Shepherd reported that:

*Termpapers Unlimited, Inc., [was] a nationwide operation run by Ward Warren, a self-made millionaire at twenty-three. The company employs some 3,000 ghosts [ghostwriters] during the academic year who toil in every major U.S. and **Canadian** city, cranking out, by Warren's own estimation, "90 percent of all the term papers now being disseminated in the country." (Shepherd, 1973, p. 172). (Emphasis added).*

By 1973, the Warren brothers were self-made millionaires (Shepherd, 1973). By that time, they claimed to have writers in every major US *and Canadian* city. Their business was not limited to the United States. There is evidence to suggest that in addition having suppliers from Canada, they also had customers from Canada.

The company run by the Ward and Ken Warren was not the only game in town though. Let's look at another company from the same time period; one specifically providing services for school-age children...

A few years ago, my colleague Roswita Dressler and I found evidence of contract cheating companies marketing to students as young as Grade 6 in Canada (Eaton & Dressler, 2019, 2020). What we did not know at the time, was that term paper mills had been serving the K-12 sector since at least the 1970s.

Figure 7*Slide 7: Bobley Publishing Company*


\$5 SPEEDS DATA TO BUSY PUPILS: Not a Term-Paper Mill! The Offer ...
By GEORGE VECSEY Special to The New York Times
New York Times (1923-Current file); Oct 21, 1973; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times
pg. 38

**\$5 SPEEDS DATA
TO BUSY PUPILS**

**Company Will Do Research
for Young Subscribers**

By GEORGE VECSEY

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Bobley Publishing Company

By 1973, news of American term paper mills serving Canadian *school-age customers* is evident.

“Mr. Bobley displayed a folder full of letters from students from *Nova Scotia* to Alabama, thanking the service for having helped them make the honor roll or win an academic award.”
(Vecsey, 1973, p. 38)

This *New York Times* article from 1973 offers details of Bobley Publishing Company, a subscription-based “research service” for school children, for \$5 USD per month (paid by parents). The owner, Mr. Bobley, described receiving thank you letters from children from “Nova Scotia to Alabama” (Vecsey, 1973, p. 38).

So, we have evidence to show that US-based term paper mills had Canadians as both employees and customers at the K-12 and post-secondary levels going back at least 50 years.

Figure 8

Slide 8: Company Names of Some 1970s US-Based Term Paper Mills

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**Company names of
some 1970s
US-Based Term
Paper Mills**

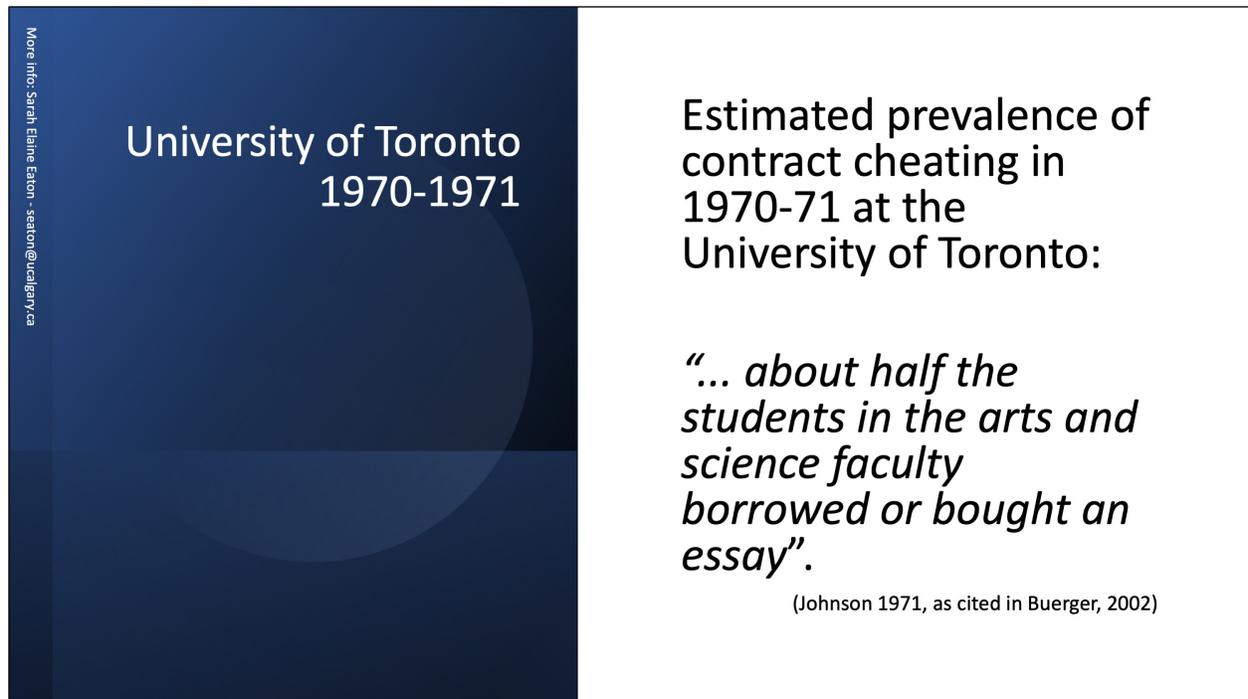
- **Termpapers Unlimited**
- **International Term Papers**
- **Quality Bullshit**
- **Universal Termpapers**

(Goodman, 1971a, 1971b)

Journalists have documented the existence of dozens of term paper mills operating across the Eastern Seaboard of the United States by the early 1970s. Here is a list of some of the larger companies, each claiming to employ dozens, if not hundreds of writers, and have thousands or tens of thousands of pre-written term papers available for sale. This led to law suits and eventually, legislation in 17 US states, making it illegal to operate a term paper mill (Newton & Lang, 2016).

Figure 9

Slide 9: University of Toronto 1970-1971



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University of Toronto
1970-1971

Estimated prevalence of contract cheating in 1970-71 at the University of Toronto:

“... about half the students in the arts and science faculty borrowed or bought an essay”.

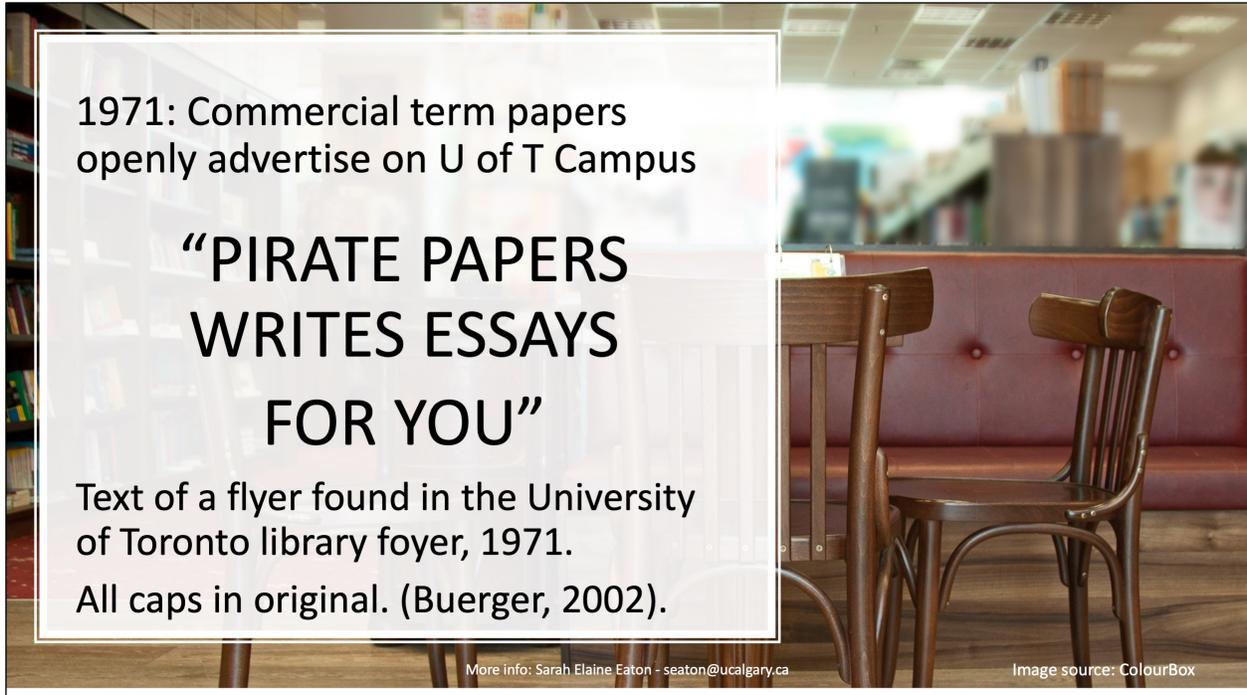
(Johnson 1971, as cited in Buerger, 2002)

If you are thinking that this was solely an American industry that conducted outreach into Canada, then think again. An investigative journalist in Toronto, claimed to have evidence that in the 1970-1971 academic year at the University of Toronto “... about half the students in the arts and science faculty borrowed or bought an essay” (Johnson 1971, as cited in Buerger, 2002, p. 296).

The “borrowing” is described as an early file-sharing scheme, similar to old school frat files (Eaton, 2021b) in which students donated their completed work to a co-op in return for access to others’ work. This of course, was a pre-cursor to the online file-sharing services we have today.

Figure 10

Slide 10: Pirate Papers Ad



In his PhD thesis on plagiarism, Geoffrey Buerger, a student at Dalhousie University in Halifax around the turn of this millennium, offers elaborate details about the early term paper mill industry, citing original artefacts he collected during his visits to Canadian campuses. One of these was a flyer found in the University of Toronto library foyer in 1971. It reads, “PIRATE PAPERS WRITE ESSAYS FOR YOU” (all caps in original) (Buerger, 2002, p. 297). Pirate Papers was a Toronto-based commercial essay mill, writers Buerger (2002), and by 1973, their flyers were offering more details including a set schedule of fees, with essays starting at \$4 CAD per page.

Figure 11

Slide 11: Toronto-Based Commercial Term Paper Companies in the 1970s



Toronto-Based Commercial Term Paper Companies in the 1970s

Canadian-owned essay mills operating between 1971 and 1975 included:

- Pirate Papers
- Essay Services
- Tempapers Service

(Buerger, 2002)

Image source: ColourBox

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Historical records show that Canadians owned and operated numerous term paper mills of their own. Here's a list of some of the ones that were operating out of Toronto, in 1971-1972. To put this another way, we have evidence that shows the early contract cheating industry was thriving in Canada as far back as half a century ago, with multiple operators. It is important to acknowledge that although the evidence available at this point highlights Toronto, it would be a fool's errand to think that was the only city where essay mills were active in Canada. Check out this next slide, for example, that points to contract cheating activity in the west in the same time period...

Figure 12

Slide 12: Calgary Herald, February 14, 1972



Here is a headline from a local newspaper, the *Calgary Herald*, from February 14, 1972. By 1972, we see increased activity that Canadian newspapers across the country were reporting about commercial term paper mills. This is just one example from a local paper.

Figure 13

Slide 13: The Globe and Mail, April 22, 1972

Term paper mills make national news in Canada –
The Globe and Mail,
April 22, 1972

Screening jout the cheat
The Globe and Mail (1936-2016); Apr 22, 1972; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Globe and Mail
pg. 6

Screening out the cheat

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It didn't take long before commercial term paper mills were making headlines in national news, too. Check out this headline clipping from the *Globe and Mail* from April 22, 1972. These are just a few examples of dozens of newspaper clippings I have collected from mainstream Canadian newspapers over the years. I don't have time to show all of them to you today, but trust me when I say that the Canadian media has been covering stories for a long time and contract cheating has been active in Canada for decades. However, the issue became particularly problematic in the 1970s, as commercial term paper mills were beginning to operate at scale, serving thousands of Canadian students.

Figure 14

Slide 14: Bill 174: An Act Respecting Ghost Written Term Papers and Examinations

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Bill 174: An Act Respecting Ghost Written Term Papers and Examinations (Ontario, Canada)

June 1972

- A private member's bill – Bill 174 - was introduced in Ontario by Member of the Provincial Parliament (MPP), the Honourable Albert Roy (Ontario Legislature, 1972; Roy, 1972).
- The bill never made it past the first reading.
- Contract cheating has continued to proliferate in Canada ever since.

JUNE 14, 1972

3651

Mr. Cassel: Has the minister investigated my inquiry with respect to the tobacco situation and the seemingly unnecessary requirement for them to file the rebate list on tobacco, particularly in view of the computer equipment now available within the department?

Hon. Mr. Grossman: Mr. Speaker, of course I promised the hon. member that I would ask my officials to look into the suggestion which he made and which seemed to me at that time to have a great deal of merit. I haven't had a report back and certainly we are working on it.

I asked there are other aspects of the whole matter of collections which are receiving our attention so there would be less red tape involved in order to reduce the amount of work required by the collectors of these taxes generally.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has now expired.

Petitions.

Presenting reports.

Reports.

Mrs. M. Birch from the standing social development committee presented the committee's report which was read as follows and adopted:

Your committee begs to report the following bills without amendment:

Bill 125, An Act to amend the Secondary Schools and Boards of Education Act.

Bill 126, An Act to amend the Public Schools Act.

The committee begs to report the following bills with certain amendments:

Bill 124, An Act to amend the Ministry of Education Act.

Bill 128, An Act to amend the Schools Administration Act.

Mr. Speaker: Shall these bills as reported be ordered for third reading?

Agreed.

Mr. Speaker: Motion.

Introduction of bills.

The hon. member for High Park.

CONTROL OF PROMOTIONAL GAMES

Mr. Shulman moves first reading of bill intituled, An Act to Control Promotional Games.

Motion agreed to; first reading of the bill.

Mr. Shulman: Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this bill is to regulate and control promotional games such as we see run by various corporations. It will require that these games be registered with the government and will ensure that the prizes which are promised are actually delivered.

Mr. Speaker: Introduction of bills.

Mr. Deane: Why don't you move second reading of it?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Ottawa East.

GHOST-WRITTEN TERM PAPERS AND EXAMINATIONS

Mr. Roy moves first reading of bill intituled, An Act respecting Ghost-Written Term Papers and Examinations, 1972.

Motion agreed to; first reading of the bill.

Mr. Roy: Mr. Speaker, this bill enables the Attorney General, on the request of the Minister of Colleges and Universities (Mr. Kerr), or the Minister of Education (Mr. Wells), to bring a civil action in the Supreme Court to stop the operations of a corporation, or business, which deals in ghost-written term papers or examinations.

Mr. Shulman: It should also outlaw politicians' ghost-written speeches!

SPEAKER'S RULING ON EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS FROM COMMITTEE MEETINGS

Mr. Speaker: Before we enter upon the order of the day, I should like to deal with a matter that arose during yesterday's proceedings. Yesterday, a question was raised regarding the exclusion of the press from meetings of the public accounts committee and reference was made to standing order 7 which states that "All strangers may be excluded from the House on a motion properly moved and adopted by the House."

Rule 161 states that "The proceedings in the legislative assembly of Ontario, and in all committees of the assembly," shall be

The problem was so bad in the 1970s, that one politician decided to take a stand. On June 14, 1972, the Honourable Albert Roy, Member of the Provincial Parliament of Ontario, introduced a private member's bill to address the problem of what today we call *contract cheating* (Roy, 1972). Bill 174, An Act Respecting Ghost Written Term Papers and Examinations received a first reading in the legislature. The official report of the debate (the Hansard), recorded the introduction of the bill as follows:

Mr. Roy moves first reading of bill intituled, An Act respecting Ghost-Written Term Papers and Examinations, 1972.

Motion agreed to; first reading of the bill.

Mr. Roy: Mr. Speaker, this bill enables the Attorney General, on the request of the Minister of Colleges and Universities (Mr. Kerr), or the Minister of Education (Mr. Wells), to bring a civil action in the Supreme Court to stop operations of a corporation, or business, which deals in ghost-written term papers or examinations.

Mr. Shulman: It should also outlaw politicians' ghost-written speeches! (Legislative Assembly of Ontario Official report of debates (Hansard), 1972 p. 3651)

The bill never made it past the first reading. One interesting detail to note though, is that the bill endeavoured to curb not only term papers written by third parties, but also examinations, which suggests that the practice of hiring impersonators to write one's exams in Canada has been a concern for many decades.

Figure 15

Slide 15: 1980s: Term Paper Mill Undercover Sting Operation in Toronto



1980s: Term Paper Mill Undercover Sting Operation in Toronto

- Target: Custom Essay Service (CES), run by Derek and Marilyn Sim of Sunderland, Ontario.
- Administrators from York University, Toronto, helped with planning.
- Sting operation planned by officers at Division 21 of Metropolitan Toronto Police. Several months of planning started in July 1988.

Image source: ColourBox
More info: Sarah Elaine Eaton - seaton@ucalgary.ca

Let's fast forward to the 1980s and look at the case of a police sting operation against Custom Essay Service (CES) in Toronto. I'm drawing again on the work of Buerger (2002), who investigated the case in exacting detail, interviewing a number of individuals directly involved including Detective Graham Hanlon at 31 Division and Sergeant Brian Dickson at 21 Division of the Metropolitan Toronto Police (now known as the Toronto Police Service), who led the sting operation that resulted in charges.

The Toronto police initiated the investigation at the request of York University. Custom Essay Service was run by Derek and Marilyn Sim of Sunderland, Ontario (Buerger, 2002). The operation took months to plan, beginning in July 1988 with the raid happening in April of 1989.

Figure 16*Slide 16: 1980s: Term Paper Mill Undercover Sting Operation in Toronto*

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1980s: Term Paper Mill Undercover Sting Operation in Toronto

- Cst. Suzanne Beauchamp posed as a student to place an order for an essay.
- Police raided the premises of Custom Essay Service, located at 4 Collier Street, Toronto.
 - Near Yonge St. & Bloor St.
 - Across the street from the Toronto Public Library.



4 Collier St., Toronto, as of May, 2021
Image Source: Google Maps

Constable Suzanne Beauchamp was recruited to place an order with CES for Sociology 1010.06A, a course she had actually taken when she was a student at York University herself, so she could speak legitimately about the course and the kind of paper required (Buerger, 2002). After Cst. Beauchamp successfully bought the essay, a Criminal Code search warrant was issued to the police. Police raided the premises of Custom Essay Service, located at 4 Collier Street in Toronto. If you're not familiar with Toronto, it's located not far from Yonge St. and Bloor St., and directly across the street from the Toronto Public Library.

I retrieved this photo of the address from Google maps in May 2021. You can see that the building is now occupied on the lower level by a Sushi restaurant. The upper offices are occupied by a variety of other businesses. At the far end of the street on the corner, there's a pizza restaurant, Mama's Pizza, and the sign says they've been there since 1957. This detail becomes important later on. But for now, let's turn our attention back to the sting operation.

Figure 17

Slide 17: 1980s: Term Paper Mill Undercover Sting Operation in Toronto

1980s: Term Paper Mill Undercover Sting Operation in Toronto

- Police raid of Custom Essay Service showed that from January to April, 1989:
 - 530 order forms on file
 - Q1 Gross income of \$98,000 CAD
 - Owners kept half the income (Buerger, 2002)

- Let's do the math...
 - Q1 = \$98,000 CAD → ~398,000 CAD/year
- Conclusion: If ONE essay mill was bringing in this amount of money and we know they were not the only business in operation, it is likely that essay mills **in Toronto alone brought in more than \$1M CAD a year in the 1980s.**

More info: Sarah Elaine Eaton - seaton@ucalgary.ca image source: ColourBox



During the raid, police retrieved boxes and boxes of term papers (Buerger, 2002) and documents showing that between January and March 1989, the company had about 530 order forms on file. Financial records showed a gross income of \$98,000 CAD for that same three-month period. Records showed that the owners kept half of the income.

Let's dig into these numbers a bit. If the company made \$98,000 CAD in Q1 of 1989, we can multiply that by four to get an estimate for the whole year. Assuming that the company made the same amount of money each fiscal quarter (which we actually cannot say with any certainty, but it is the best we can do), we can estimate that the company brought in about \$398,000 CAD per year.

This was one term paper mill. Just one! Since we know that there were other locally-owned term paper mills that had been operating in the area for at least a decade, it would be reasonable to conclude that contract cheating companies in Toronto alone brought in at least \$1 Million CAD per year in the late 1980s.

Figure 18

Slide 18: Estimate: Term Paper Mill Industry Income in Canada in the 1980s

Estimate: Term Paper Mill Industry Income in Canada in the 1980s

MADE IN CANADA

- Based on evidence from ONE term-paper mill, Custom Essay Service.
- Reasonable estimate for Toronto alone: \$1 Million CAD/ year.
- Assumption: Term-paper mills were operating in every major Canadian city and university town, including: Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Saskatoon, Regina, Winnipeg, Ottawa, Waterloo, Montreal, Fredericton, Halifax, etc.
- A reasonable, if not conservative estimate: **Term paper mills in Canada likely had a combined income of over \$10 Million CAD per year by the late 1980s.** (Probably more; scant evidence available).

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At this point, I will emphasize that Toronto was not the only city where this was occurring. It happens that we have exact details for this raid against one term paper mill, but it is safe to assume that term paper mills were operating in every major Canadian city and university town, including Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Saskatoon, Regina, Winnipeg, Ottawa, Waterloo, Montreal, Fredericton, Halifax, etc.

Based on what we know, I am going to go out on a limb and suggest that a reasonable, if not conservative estimate, for the term paper mill industry income in Canada by the late 1980s would have been at least \$10 Million CAD per year. I will be the first to recognize that I am making a lot of assumptions here. There is actually very little evidence to support this estimate. I am basing it on the Custom Essay Service raid information, and triangulating that with newspaper reports from across the country, showing that term paper mills were likely operating in every major city.

Over time, as we learn even more about the early commercial term paper mill industry in Canada, we will no doubt gather more evidence that can lead to more accurate estimates. This is merely a starting point. I issue a challenge to my fellow scholars, particularly the historians, to research the history of term paper mills in your own regions and share what you learn so we can get a more accurate picture over time. Let's turn our attention back to the case of Custom Essay Service. So... what happened after the raid?

Figure 19

Slide 19: 1980s: Term Paper Mill Undercover Sting Operation in Toronto



1980s: Term Paper Mill Undercover Sting Operation in Toronto

Derek & Marilyn Sim charged with:

- 1 count of conspiracy to utter forged documents;
- 7 seven counts of uttering forged documents (Beurger, 2002; Couple charged in essay scam, 1989)
- Case was believed be to be “the first case of its kind in Canada and in the Commonwealth” (Schmidt, 1998).
- The case was heard by Judge George E. Carter. He dismissed the charges on September 11, 1990, finding there was no intent to commit a criminal act (Beurger, 2002).
- Over 100 students faced academic misconduct discipline. All were found responsible. Sanctions from receiving a grade of zero on the assignment to a 10-year suspension from the university (Beurger, 2002).

Image source: ColourBox

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Well, Derek and Marilyn Sim were charged with one count of conspiracy to utter forged documents and seven counts of uttering forged documents (Buerger, 2002; Couple charged in essay scam, 1989). One reporter wrote that this was “the first case of its kind in Canada and in the Commonwealth” (Schmidt, 1998). The case was heard on September 11, 1990. Judge George E. Carter dismissed the charges on the finding there was no intent to commit a criminal act (Buerger, 2002). So, the Sims got away without any penalty, but the students involved were not so lucky. Over 100 students faced academic misconduct disciplinary consequences. All were found responsible by the University, and received sanctions ranging from a grade of zero on the assignment to a 10-year suspension from the university (Buerger, 2002). There is evidence to show that Custom Essay Service continued to successfully operate well into the 1990s and started to move its business online when the Internet was commercialized.

Figure 20

Slide 20: 1990s: A Canadian Essay Mill Writer Tells All – Harper's Magazine

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1990s: A Canadian Essay Mill Writer Tells All

- *Harper's* magazine, June 1995
- Writing under the pen name “Abigail Witherspoon”, a writer for a Toronto term papermill, (also referred to by a fake name), gives a 9-page exposé about her experience.

Image source: <https://harpers.org/archive/1995/06/>
 Used with permission of Harper's magazine.

In a fascinating expose, a Toronto-based writer who went by the pen name of “Abigail Witherspoon” wrote a 9-page expose in the June 1995 issue of *Harper's* magazine, about her life writing for a Toronto-based essay mill. She called the business “Tailormade” in her essay, saying that she had changed the name of the business for the article, but gave enough details, including that it was located less than a block from the public library, that one scholar was able to determine that Witherspoon was writing about Custom Essay Service (Buerger, 2002).

Witherspoon mentioned that writers would gather at a bar around the corner where they had a regular table, to await their next assignment. Remember, the pizza joint that's been there since 1957? It's front door is right around the corner from the offices where Custom Essay Service was located. It is possible that is the same place where the writers hung out.

Witherspoon gave exact details about how much the company charged, as of 1995:

- \$20 CAD / page for 1st and 2nd year assignments
- \$22 CAD / page for 3rd and 4th year assignments
- \$24 CAD / page for advanced and technical assignments

The owners kept half the money and the writers kept the other half. Witherspoon goes into elaborate details about her life as a writer for this Toronto-based essay mill, including writing admissions essays for applicants to Canadian medical schools and mentioned that the assignments she liked the least were those in which she had to write up customers' reflections about their experiences in their practicum as pre-service teachers (Witherspoon, 1995).

So, we have historical evidence, with detailed records, showing that the commercial contract cheating industry has been successfully operating since in Canada at least the 1970s. Up to this point, I have drawn on my training as a humanities scholar, to examine historical records including documents and newspaper articles. I am not a historian by training, but having two degrees in literature certainly provided a strong basis to analyze the available documentary evidence. Those trained in quantitative methods might call this anecdotal evidence, but I would counter and say that there is a difference between historical and anecdotal evidence.

Those requiring numbers in order to believe any of this, get their wish when we move into the 21st century.

Figure 21

Slide 21: 2000s: Canadian Research, Advocacy, Collaboration

2000s: Canadian Research, Advocacy, Collaboration							
	Christensen Hughes & McCabe (2006a)			Stoesz & Los (2019)			
	Respondents from across Canada			Respondents from the province of Manitoba			
	Single study			Study #1		Study #2	
	High school (n = 1269) %	Undergrad students (n = 13 644) %	Graduate students (n = 1318) %	17-20-year-olds (n = 28) %	21-27-year-olds (n = 31) %	28 –32 year olds (n = 30) %	12.8 – 17.9 year olds (n = 28) %
Q: Turning in a paper obtained in large part from a term paper "mill" or website that did charge a fee	1	1	0	17.9	0	10.0	5.6

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In the first few years of the new millennium, Julia Christensen Hughes who was at the University of Guelph at the time, partnered with Donald (Don) McCabe of Rutgers University in the United States and co-founder of the International Center for Academic Integrity, to run McCabe’s survey in Canada. They published two important articles in 2006 the *Canadian Journal of Higher Education* and are both freely available on line (Christensen Hughes 2006a, 2006b). Here I’ve highlighted the results of just one question they asked from their survey: Turning in a paper obtained in large part from a term paper "mill" or website that charged a fee.

You can see that they surveyed 1269 high school students, 13,644 undergraduate students, and 1,318 graduate students. Their results showed that 1% of high school students, 1% of undergrads, and none of grad students self-reported to have bought academic work online.

More than a dozen years later, Brenda Stoesz and Ryan Los at the University of Manitoba, replicated the McCabe survey in their province, in two different studies, both with students working towards high school completion. Their results revealed that as many as 17.9% of research participants self-reported having turned in papers obtained from a contact cheating company that charged a fee, though results varied across age groups.

Comparing the results from these studies is not problem-free. Stoesz and Los only surveyed students from Manitoba and their sample size was much smaller. Also, they focused on individuals taking junior high and high school courses (even the 28-32 year-olds studying at adult education centres) and did not collect data from students enrolled in post-secondary courses. Notwithstanding these differences, we

cannot ignore the results. The most current data we have, though limited, shows 5.6% to 17.9% of students have self-reported having bought academic work online.

Figure 22

Slide 22: Curtis & Clare 2017

Curtis & Clare (2017)

Meta-analysis of previously collected data sets ($N = 1378$).

3.5% of students, on aggregate, ever engaged in contract cheating, but this varied among data sets from 0.3% to 7.9%

~2/3 of students who engage in contract cheating once are likely to become repeat offenders.

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How Prevalent is Contract Cheating and to What Extent are Students Repeat Offenders?

Guy J. Curtis¹ · Joseph Clare²

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Abstract Contract cheating, or plagiarism via paid ghostwriting, is a significant academic ethical issue, especially as reliable methods for its prevention and detection in students' assignments remain elusive. Contract cheating in academic assessment has been the subject of much recent debate and concern. Although some scandals have attracted substantial media attention, little is known about the likely prevalence of contract cheating by students for their university assignments. Although rates of contract cheating tend to be low, criminological theories suggest that people who employ ghostwriters for their assignments are likely to re-offend, and little is known about re-offence rates in this form of academic misconduct. We combined previously-collected datasets ($N = 1378$) and conducted additional, and previously-unreported, analyses on self-report measures of contract cheating prevalence. We found that few students (3.5%), on aggregate, ever engaged in contract cheating but this varied substantially among samples (from 0.3% to 7.9%). Of those who ever engaged in contract cheating, 62.5% did so more than once. The data also suggested that engagement in contract cheating is influenced by opportunity. These figures may help policy makers, and researchers who are creating contract-cheating detection methods, to estimate base rates of contract cheating and the likelihood of re-offence.

Keywords Contract cheating · Ghostwriting · Prevalence · Plagiarism · Academic integrity

Contract cheating is a breach of academic ethics in which students enter into an agreement to pay another person to complete assessments on their behalf (Clarke and Lancaster 2006; Walker and Trowley 2012). Typically, this involves paying the other person to write an unsupervised assessment such as an essay, report, or computer code (Clarke and Lancaster 2006;

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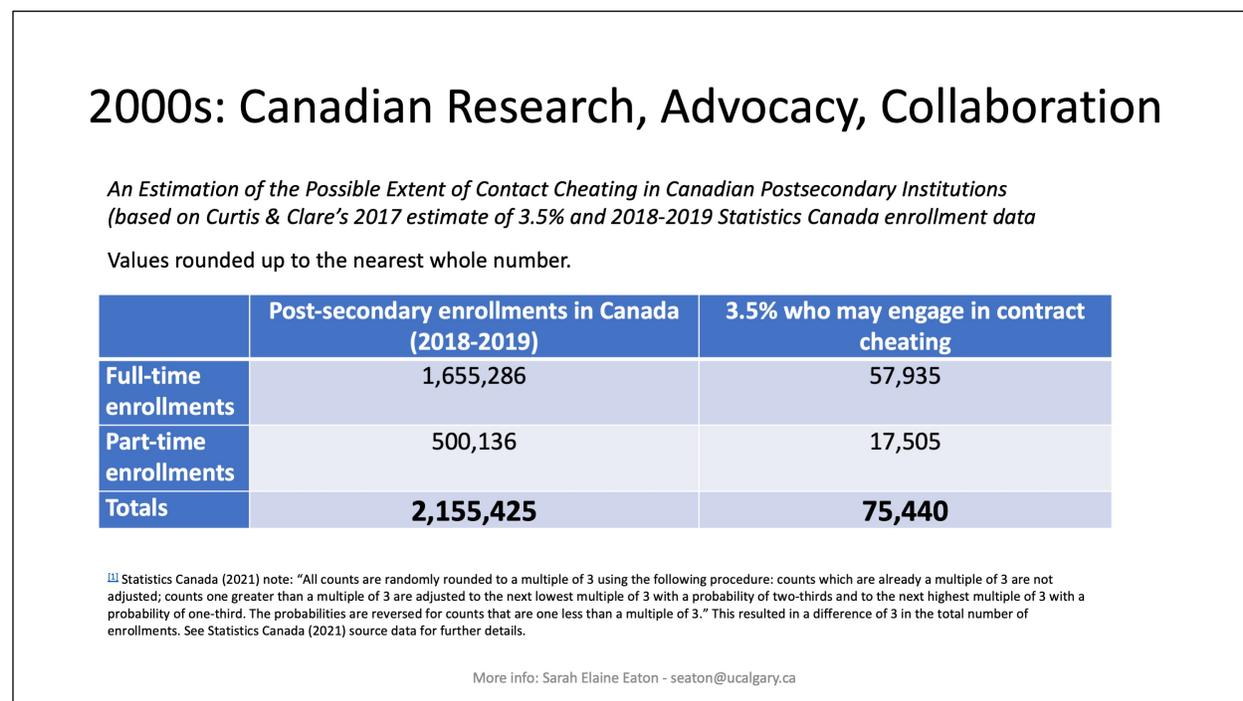
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That is even higher than the average that Guy Curtis and Joe Clare (2017) found in their 2017 meta-analysis from 2017, published in the *Journal of Academic Ethics*. Their meta-analysis of previously collected data sets, showed that on aggregate, 3.5% of students engaged in contract cheating. They noted that data sets varied from 0.3% to 7.9%. Interestingly, they also found that among students who engaged in contract cheating once, approximately two-thirds of them were likely to repeat the behaviour.

Figure 23

Slide 23: 2000s: Canadian Research, Advocacy, Collaboration



In order to get an estimate for how many students in Canada might be engaging in contract cheating at a national level, I mapped Curtis and Clare’s (2017) average of 3.5% to Statistics Canada data for post-secondary enrollments in Canada. Using this modelling technique, I was able to estimate that we can reasonably expect that at a national level, over seventy-five thousand students enrolled in Canadian colleges and universities engage in contract cheating each year. Of course, Curtis & Clare’s estimate of 3.5% of students was from 2017, so pre-COVID. We have no data available yet for how these numbers might have changed during COVID-19.

Figure 24

Slide 24: 2010-2020s: Canadian Research, Advocacy, Collaboration



Our work in Canada around contract cheating has increased dramatically over the past seven years. This timeline gives you some highlights of key activities.

In 2015 we see the first known research presentation about contract cheating in Canada. Corinne Hersey, a graduate student at the University of New Brunswick, collaborated with Thomas Lancaster on a presentation.

In 2018, the Academic Integrity Council of Ontario (AICO) established their sub-committee on contract cheating. That was the same year I launched the national academic integrity policy analysis project. Our team is presenting on that tomorrow, so come and find out more at our session tomorrow afternoon.

In 2019, contract cheating was a major focus at the first Canadian Symposium on Academic Integrity held at the University of Calgary. Thomas Lancaster did a feature presentation on contract cheating to a jam-packed audience where it was standing-room only.

Last year, Jennie Miron, who is a board member with the International Center for Academic Integrity (ICAI) led the global program for the International Day of Action Against Contract Cheating. And before the year ended, the Alberta Council on Academic Integrity (ACAI) launched a working group on contract cheating.

Here we are in 2021 where contract cheating remains a focus of this second Canadian Symposium on Academic Integrity. Before the year is out, *Academic Integrity in Canada: An enduring and essential*

challenge will be published and available as an open access book. So that leads us to the question: What's next for us in Canada?

Figure 25

Slide 25: Contract Cheating in Canada: A Call to Action

Contract Cheating in Canada: A Call to Action

- 2022 will mark the 50th year since the 1st attempt to legislate against contract cheating. Maximize this anniversary!
- Advocate for legislation to make contract cheating illegal in Canada.
- More funded research!
- Expand projects to include more people.
- Get involved in the International Day of Action Against Contract Cheating and Academic Integrity Week (Oct. 18-22, 2021)

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I conclude this session with a call to action. 2022 will mark the 50th year since the 1st attempt to legislate against contract cheating in Canada. Make sure everyone knows about Bill 174 from Ontario, proposed by the Hon. Albert Roy in 1972. We need to maximize this anniversary so we can use it as a basis for more conversations about legislating against predatory contract cheating companies. Although legislation is not the only solution, it is an important step.

This project required more than 1000 hours of archival research that I conducted over almost two years. It was entirely unfunded and so I was not able to include or train any research assistants in the work. We need funded research so we can provide training and opportunities for graduate students to become more involved in this work because they are the future of academic integrity.

The number of people working on contract cheating in Canada has been fairly limited. We need teams of people working on larger projects, with people in every province and territory, at every level of education and government working to uphold integrity in our educational systems. We need a critical mass of people doing this work in a sustained manner over time. We need resources, time, and funding to do this work. It is not enough to address this massive problem off the sides of our desks.

My final call to action is to engage others at your own schools. The International Day of Action Against Contract Cheating happens on the 3rd Wednesday of October every year. This year, the Alberta Council on Academic Integrity (ACAI) declared a province-wide Academic Integrity Week around the day of

action and also to align with the European Academic Integrity Week, organized by our friends at the European Network for Academic Integrity (ENAI). British Columbia and Manitoba have taken us up on our challenge to extend academic integrity week to their provinces. And today, I extend that challenge to all of you. If you leave this symposium with one concrete idea to take action on, make it declaring October 18 – 22, 2021 Academic Integrity Week at your institution. Together we can take action against contract cheating!

Enjoy the rest of the Symposium.

Acknowledgements

Figure 26

Slide 26: Acknowledgements

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- I extend special thanks to Dr. Geoffrey Buerger, whose doctoral thesis was particularly helpful to provide historical context. Dr. Buerger took the time to meet with me to share further details of his research via a video conference call as I was researching this presentation and the chapter I wrote for *Academic Integrity in Canada: An enduring and essential challenge*.
- Finally, I owe a particular debt of gratitude to Ms. Kate Laukys, Index and Reference Officer of the House Publications and Language Services branch of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. She tracked down and sent me links to the original legislative documents for the proposed bill brought forward 1972 archived online, which I would never have found otherwise.

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